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Ecclesia
1835

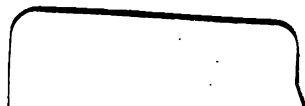
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REMARKS
ON
A NATIONAL CHURCH,
AND
REASONS WHY
THE CHOICE OF CLERGYMEN
BY
THEIR CONGREGATIONS,
SHOULD BE ADDED TO THE REMEDIAL MEASURES
PROPOSED BY GOVERNMENT.
BY
A MEMBER OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE.

LONDON:
J. HATCHARD AND SON, 187, PICCADILLY.
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R E M A R K S
ON
A NATIONAL CHURCH,
&c.

As laws that may be useful in one state of society, may not be required, or may be even pernicious in another ; it is on the making changes in the laws and institutions of a country corresponding to the progress of civilisation, that the good or bad government of that country depends. The expediency of this adaptation to the general wants of the community is peculiarly observable with reference to religious institutions, since with respect to them mankind in different ages have had opposite and extreme opinions ; therefore if we assume it to be advisable to have an Established Church for promoting the *proper* objects of all churches, *the religious and moral instruction of the people*, it by no means follows

that the church established in this country *for the propagation of a favored religion*, is of a character the best calculated for those purposes ; and unless possessed of such character, the unqualified approval of its present form by persons who have no interested object to influence their judgment, must be considered to proceed from a fallacious idea of its adaptation for those purposes. With a view to the just appreciation of that question, all that we desire of the reader is, that he will give the subject of these pages a candid consideration.

It too frequently happens for a clear view of the subject in question, that THE Established Church and AN Established Church are confounded together ; but unless persons can distinguish between them it is in vain to expect that they can appreciate the relative value of different church establishments ; it being possible that the church established in this country in connexion with the state, is as remote from what an Established Church should be, as the having no establishment at all would be remote from what should be. And thus although the connexion of church and state may, for the good of religion, have been formerly expedient in this country, it does not therefore follow that the connexion in its original condition shall be always expedient ; and to refuse to consider the expediency of a modification,

or even the dissolution of that connexion, is as unreasonable as to deny the expediency of the connexion under any circumstances.

The following pages are written not from any unfriendly feeling towards an Established Church, but from the apprehension that the connexion is frequently prejudicial to true religion—as, unless regulated with great judgment, more likely to produce dissent and schisms in the religious world than the dissolution of that connexion would in a well-instructed community; for we think that the tendency in man to resist every interference with his volition in relation to religion, is such as to induce him to eschew doctrines when clothed with the garb of secular authority, to which identical doctrines when proscribed he would cling with the tenacity of a martyr. In short, we are of opinion that if the intelligence of the people were sufficiently cultivated, so that reason instead of prejudice should direct their opinions and conduct, it would then be perfectly immaterial whether there were an Established Church or not.

The course we propose to pursue in the following pages is, after referring to some of the reasons used for and against *an* Established Church, and the duty of government towards the community on the score of religion, to consider the present state of *the* Established Church, with

the nature of the modifications required in it, particularly as to the appointment of clergymen ; and to conclude with a brief inquiry into the efficiency of the remedial measures proposed by government.

In undertaking this task we are sensible as well of the difficulties attending the execution, as of the danger of our opinions being considered hostile to the Established Church ; but our object being to elicit the truth, we have not been deterred by either of these considerations from approaching the subject : yet that our sentiments may not be thought to proceed from an inimical feeling, we deem it right to state that we are of the Established Church ; and that our desire for its welfare is the sole cause of our proposing those modifications that may, by some persons, be considered subversive of the Establishment ; we concede to those persons a conscientious disapproval of our suggestions : we ask from them credit for like conscientiousness in their proposal.

By an "independent church," when used in these pages, is meant generally all churches in this country unconnected with the state, administering the offices of religion according to the dictates of conscience without the interference of any temporal power ; and having no public revenues or temporalities recognised by the law.

In a history of the church lately published

under the superintendence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, it might have been expected, that the question of the expediency of the church and state connexion would have been discussed in a manner which its importance demands; but in adverting to the evils resulting from the Establishment, the author says, "those evils originated not in the system itself, but in the blindness of those who administered it." This is an extraordinary inference; for if the author can separate the operation of church establishments from the instruments by which the operation is effected, he will in that case only excuse the church at the expense of its ministers; or his argument may be stated thus, that the Established Church of the present day is to be considered entitled to claim the good resulting from the connexion upwards of one thousand five hundred years since, and not to be considered answerable for any of the monstrous evils, down to the present time, perpetrated under its sanction.

Religious writers in favour of an Established Church, are not satisfied to rest their case on the expediency of the connexion, but they take occasionally a different tone; thus, in Milner's Church History the author asserts, "That the state has a right to establish the true religion by positive institutions." (Vol. ii. page 216.)

Now, inasmuch as all power possessed by a state ought to be derived from the general consent of the community, founded on the expediency of the power for the public good, this assertion does not advance the question, unless it is assumed, that the establishment of the *true* religion by positive institutions is expedient. And even if that were admitted likewise, there would remain the debateable point, as to the mode in which the *true* religion is best established; and which involves the whole matter in dispute. In England there is one mode of doing it; in Scotland another mode, differing in all its leading features from that of the Church of England; and in Ireland the mode adopted by the followers of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the religion of nearly the whole of Ireland, is altogether different from the mode adopted in England or in Scotland.

When it can be shown that true religion in any country has ever been forwarded by persecution, in that case another of the assertions will be conceded, “that the state has a right to insure public respect to those institutions by penal laws.” (Vol. ii. page 216.)

From the position taken unwisely, in our opinion, by those and by other persons, one would be led to imagine that the connexion of church and state was of a divine nature, and not a poli-

tical institution for strengthening the temporal government as well as for propagating Christianity—to be retained or done away with according to its expediency or otherwise. To such persons all reasons, *pro* or *con*, are vain. We who are contented to be guided by the standard of expediency, shall proceed to deal with the subject according to its effect on the present state of society, without the least regard to its operation fifteen hundred years ago.

To increase the moral habits of the people, and at the same time to deal judiciously with their susceptibility of novel and extreme doctrines in religion, are perhaps the most difficult tasks of our religious instructors. If not checked and with judgment, that susceptibility assumes a more distinctive character, until by continued indulgence, it excludes the rational view of the subject, and becomes confirmed monomania. If checked injudiciously, the propensity is strengthened, the symptoms are aggravated, and the termination is more speedy and certain. To preserve a middle course between that of tamely yielding to the above propensity, and that of injudiciously checking it--to kill the baneful germ, and in its place to implant an enlightened Christian doctrine, may we hold, be accomplished by zealous and well-informed religious teachers. Whilst we are bound to admit

that the established clergy in this country have not as yet judiciously used the means in their power to direct that propensity, we are equally ready to admit, that neither have the independent clergy succeeded in accomplishing that object.

Then inasmuch as the moral tendency in man depends principally on habit, it is thought that in the present uninstructed state of the people in this country, a judicious use of the Established Church might be made, as a means of providing a model for the formation of the religious sentiments of the community. But as religion in many countries besides England is found generally to be in the inverse ratio to the amount of interference by government in matters of conscience, the extreme nicety of such interference to be useful instead of prejudicial, is obvious. To attain the happy mean, and with the view to discourage superstitious fanaticism, and to prevent deistical scepticism, the Established Church should be so modelled as to keep out of sight the least semblance of control, and be felt only as a means afforded for our religious welfare by the solicitude of a paternal government. At the same time, until a corresponding feeling of filial regard be entertained by the people towards the government, it is not to be expected that they will repose trust in a religious establishment

connected with government. The conceding to congregations the power of nominating their own clergymen, would materially conduce to such a reciprocation of regard and confidence.

In a rude state of mankind, in order to accomplish any object desired by the rulers of the people, it is only necessary to secure the co-operation of those persons, who, by pretending to neglect worldly concerns and to devote themselves to the religious instruction of the people, acquire dominion over the minds of their followers; hence the use of church establishments in connexion with the state, as a means of influencing or controlling the governed. The chief evil attendant upon a government conducted on that principle, is, that as the submission of the people is in proportion to their ignorance, therefore the interest of the rulers naturally inclines them to discourage the progress of instruction. Another way of governing in a rude state, is by appealing to the passions of the people, by encouraging war and violence, and thus blinding them to their being used only for feeding the ambition of despots; to which way any system of deception is preferable. But there is yet another mode of governing, by the influence of reason, when the intelligence of the people has been to a certain extent cultivated—when emancipation from mental as well as from corporeal

bondage has been secured, and the people have thrown from them the toy of vain inflated literature, and repudiated the sophisms of spurious sentiment ; which mode in its operation is alike remote from the abject superstition attendant on the sway of priests, as from the excited conduct of the unreflecting multitude, lashed into fury by the declamation of demagogues. That other mode is about to be introduced into this country. It is to be expected that the consequent change will be unpalatable, as well to those persons who are interested in upholding the establishment in its present form, as to the timid and the superstitious. But notwithstanding this, and the clamour raised about spoliation and revolution, the necessity of very considerable changes has forced itself on the conviction of a majority of the community.

Although, in our opinion, it is advisable to have a modified Established Church in this country, at all events for many years to come ; yet we have arrived at that conclusion not so much from a conviction of the inherent useful qualities of an establishment, as from an apprehension that the people are not prepared to make a judicious use of their liberty ; therefore it is not to be expected that we shall agree with the reasoning of persons who come to the conclusion in favour of the Established Church, from a con-

viction of its possessing every useful quality that is required. Of the reasons put forward we shall notice those from which we differ.

It is asserted, for instance, that, without the establishment, the agricultural parts of the country would be frequently left without religious instruction; and that the use of free seats in parish churches is owing to the Establishment. No doubt if the growth of religious feelings in individuals depended on such accommodations, the position were good; but unfortunately for the argument, in many parts of the country with abundance of parish churches, and of free seats, the people desert them for Dissenting meeting houses; nay, even assuming a want of church accommodation, that is not found to prevent persons in thinly-peopled parts of Scotland from walking ten or twenty miles to the nearest church. Without altogether ascribing the strength of religious feelings to the difficulty of satisfying them, yet the consciousness of submitting to fatigue and privation in the performance of our duty, has frequently a salutary effect on the mind. And sure we are that if every alternate building in the kingdom were a church with gratis sittings, the cause of religion would gain few additional votaries on that account. People cannot be crammed with

religion, nor be made devout by an Act of Parliament.

It is maintained also that an Established Church is required for the protection of the rights of private property ; in other words, that the framework of society depends on the connexion. To support that pretence, it is necessary to assume that the established clergy have a monopoly of spiritual power over their flocks ; and that the dissenting clergy have either no moral influence, or that having such influence, they do not choose to exert it in the support of order in the country. In either case, such a mode of arguing, to say the least of it, is not only ungracious, but manifestly absurd :—

That it deserves the support of the middle classes, from the temporal advantages to themselves and their children, from a participation in the livings of the church. Now that share, though scanty, yet were enough to support the argument, if the dissolving of the connexion included the dissolution of the tithes, dues, &c. instead of their being thereby thrown open to the best qualified to fill the sacred callings, at present monopolized by a favoured class :—

That it is necessary, as a means of securing a livelihood for a body of highly educated gentlemen intended for the church. To this its oppo-

nents say, if the encouragement of literature and science require public assistance, it were infinitely better to grant it in a direct manner, than by tampering with the ministers of religion, and endangering the sanctity and usefulness of their holy calling :—

That it is necessary as a mode of supporting the junior branches of the aristocracy. Its opponents say, that rather than support them by such means, it would be advisable to grant them pensions of the same amount, to be paid by the treasury, as being less burdensome to the country :—

That it is an essential part of the English constitution ;—to which its opponents say, that whatever advantages may be supposed to accrue to government from the connexion, are more than balanced by the injury done to religion ; and that the time is past, when such an assertion implied that any attempt to improve the constitution would be insane. Also, that the assertion of government depending on the existence of an Established Church is a popular fallacy, proceeding from the parties interested in its maintenance—fostered by their successors from a conviction of its selfish advantages—and propagated by the timid and the credulous of the people, from a superstitious fear of questioning its truth.

The before mentioned reasons used in favour of an Established Church, with, in addition, the probability of an increase of fanaticism from its being put an end to, are the principal ones put forward why it should be maintained. With the exception of the last, we have no hesitation in deeming those reasons chimerical and undeserving of any weight; upon the last, our opinion of the expediency of an Established Church is founded.

To those persons who object altogether to church establishments, solely on account of their interference with the liberty of conscience, it may be said, that a considerable part of the people in this country are favourable to the Established Church; that another considerable part are so much accustomed to it, that its removal would unsettle their minds; and although the latter probably would not make any effort to preserve the connexion between church and state, yet the former would; therefore it is impolitic to hazard a contest to dissolve it, at the risk of perniciously convulsing the framework of the mind in religion, unless an evident practical good could be thereby ensured, and no other means found of accomplishing equal advantages without its dissolution. At the same time we would not be deterred by the dread of a bugbear, from giving to congregations

the power to nominate their own clergymen ; or from making other necessary changes, although the church should be considered to assume the shape of an independent church in the place of an established—more especially if by the changes the advantages of both could be secured without the disadvantages of either.

Those changes should be entered upon in a spirit friendly to the Established Church, and without party or sectarian feelings. The persons who are the most clamorous for the reformation of church and state, should be on their guard against hasty judgments ; whilst those who live by their connexion with the church, should reflect that their opinions may be influenced by their private interest. In proposing for one of those changes that congregations be allowed to nominate their own clergymen, as an addition to the remedial measures of government, there is, in our opinion, nothing to excite the fears of the friends of the Established Church for its safety ; and although the proposed measure will not altogether satisfy the friends of an independent church, yet as it must be admitted by them to be calculated to advance the interests of religion, from its obvious tendency to improve the religious character of the Christian church, by securing the ministry of zealous and useful clergymen ; we therefore hope

for the good-will of the latter to the measure, although they shall still continue opposed to the expediency of any established church.

We cannot coincide in the view, no doubt conscientiously entertained by many excellent persons, that it is proper to dissolve every connexion between church and state at once; since in the present backward state of public instruction in this country, an Established Church is in our opinion expedient, on the condition that each congregation shall have the power of nominating its own clergyman, possessing "*certain recognised qualifications for the preacher's office,*" or in other words, from among the clergy educated in the principles of the Establishment. Thus the chance of fanatical preachers being appointed would be lessened, by the church livings not being thrown open to unrestrained competition, until the people were by previous instruction prepared to use the privilege with judgment; for between the situation of an established clergyman and that of an independent clergyman, there is this difference, that the former has not an equal interest in the encouragement of fanaticism with the latter: in proportion to the difference, will be generally the amount of their relative anxiety to extirpate fanaticism; consequently the balance for this purpose is in favour of the Established Church.

The more moderate of the Dissenters would be gratified with the alteration suggested in the nomination of clergymen, from the consequent benefit to the cause of real religion; and many of them would probably return within the pale of the establishment. The more violent Dissenters would be, by this redress, deprived of their principal argument for an immediate dissolution of the Establishment, and their future opposition being weakened by the above concession, must either cease, or be continued factiously to a part of the government, then sanctioned by the most numerous religious sect in the country.

Having stated in the preceding pages the reasons which induce us to uphold the expediency of an Established Church, we shall proceed to consider the modifications that we have suggested in the present Establishment.

The principal evils of the Established Church are the manner in which its temporalities are enjoyed, and its patronage is used; upon the application of sufficient remedies for these evils, will depend the fate of that church in this country.

Although the power of the church, under the present system, depends greatly on the amount of its property, yet that property from being misapplied threatens the existence of the establishment; for although there is not more pro-

perty in the aggregate, appropriated for the support of those individuals in England, who devote themselves to the religious and moral instruction of the people, than is necessary ; yet the division of that property is so manifestly unjust and preposterous, as to excite surprise, that in an institution of such vital importance, it should have been submitted to so long, that the scale of recompensing clergymen, should be not in proportion to their usefulness, but often according to the power of their family influence and interest.

This mode of division of the property, brought about by the system of exclusive advantage to a favoured order in the state, is the most glaring evil of the connexion. After the enjoyment of the advantage for ages by that party, and with a vague feeling of doubt as to their claim thereto being valid, they naturally feel great uneasiness at any innovations being made which may possibly interfere with the monopoly.

No effort is spared to mystify the question. Thus, church property is proclaimed to be above human interference ; and the *right* is unblushingly advanced to the enjoyment of the revenues, without reference to the manner in which the spiritual duties of the cure are performed. The absurdity of both pretence and claim is becoming apparent ; and at the *risk*, as is foretold, of the

interference in the more equal appropriation of church property being considered profane; and with the *hazard* of shaking the rights of all private property, also predicted, there appears to be a speedy prospect of clerical labourers being recompensed in proportion to their usefulness. But if the lately appointed ecclesiastical commissioners, with the power in their hands to strengthen the Established Church, should, from mistaken friendship, falter on this head, they will prove themselves to be its greatest enemies. For the present we leave this part of the subject to those commissioners, and proceed to another evil in ecclesiastical polity greater than that if possible; to which evil, certainly, we do not anticipate any remedy at the hands of those commissioners,—we mean the state of church patronage.

By the present mode of using church patronage the means are afforded of introducing persons into the church as clergymen, from political or family influence, who are altogether unqualified for the sacred calling; and persons of religious tendencies are thus prevented from devoting themselves to the holy office.

To remedy the above evil in church patronage, we propose to invest congregations with the privilege of nominating their own clergymen, either directly, or through the medium of a certain

number of seat-holders to be appointed for that purpose by the congregations.

The principal argument in favour of an independent church, is, that a clergyman chosen by a congregation from their knowledge of his character and fitness, would probably be more useful than if appointed after the present mode in the Established Church ; and consequently, that the cause of religion and morality would be advanced by the substitution of a church in which the congregation nominate their clergymen.

The independents say, that before a medical practitioner is entrusted with the cure of bodily ills, the law not only takes care that he shall pass through a strict examination to prove his competency, but also an afflicted party unless satisfied of such competency, may employ another for his cure in whom he has greater confidence. The same care is taken that persons shall be properly instructed before they are allowed to gain a living as lawyers. By these means, our bodies and estates are taken care of. Yet in the cure of mental ills, in the eternal welfare of the soul, the qualification of clergymen is so little attended to, that it may be affirmed the law allows of spiritual guides being appointed, who not only are without the requisite fitness for the awful responsibility imposed on them, but

for whose services the people are compelled to pay, although they do not confide in their spiritual guidance :—Also that in Scotland, where the patronage to a great number of church livings is in the crown, the system of nomination has been adopted, by the crown almost invariably giving the living to the clergyman with the greatest number of heritors in his favour. When there is a justifying case made out against the party so recommended, the crown then exercises its power by appointing another ; but the exception only proves the rule, and there could be no objection to such a power in England being vested either in the crown, or in church commissioners, and thus the danger of an improper person being appointed by the parishioners would be obviated :—Also, that no person acquainted with the Scotch ministers will assert, that the system of appointment so practised is not found to work well ; without being attended with any of the dangers apprehended, or advanced, by those persons who object to a similar mode being adopted in England.

Assuming the above to be true, the obstacle to congregational nomination in England must be different from the reason frequently assigned, anxiety for religion ; otherwise, why does not anxiety for religion in Scotland operate in the same way ? or why is the system that is found to answer in the Scotch church, considered to be

fatal to the cause of religion in the English church? Is it from the Scotch people being more religious, that therefore they would not submit to strange clergymen being assigned to them? Is it from the livings in Scotland being so poor, as not to have offered sufficient inducement for the introduction of court patronage in their disposal? Or is it from the river Tweed running between the two countries? If from the first, it is full time that the same system were introduced into England, in the hope of a similar result, from the increase of religious feeling among the people. If from the second, the poverty of the Scotch church cannot too soon be introduced into the English church. If from the last, we see no way of obviating the difficulty, unless by an earthquake!

Against the congregational appointment of clergymen, it is asserted by its opponents that when adopted in the independent churches, the ministers so appointed are inferior to the clergymen of the Established Church; but the circumstance of the dissenting clergy in this country not having attained so high a station in public estimation as the established clergy, is no argument against their qualifications; and is to be accounted for, not from their being appointed by their congregations, but owing to the circumstance of their inferiority in secular rank,

compared with the established clergy ; for until the abject feeling experienced by the timid or weak Dissenter, resulting from such inferiority ; as well as the rancorous feeling entertained by the bold or able Dissenter, proceeding from the same cause, are both extirpated, it is too much to expect very high moral refinement among the dissenting population. It is in truth so well known, as to have become a proverb, "If you give a man an ill name, he is sure to do something to merit it."

Although there is only one reason above specified in favour of an independent church, yet the consideration involved therein—the appointment of the clergymen, is of so important a nature as to leave all others in the background. In short, if the advocates of independency are entitled to have conceded to their church a superior discrimination and judgment in the selecting their clergymen, the Established Church must either adopt their mode, or take the consequence of abiding in error. There is no spiritual objection to the congregations of the Established Church selecting their clergymen from those educated in the principles of the establishment ; indeed where such mode of appointment is practised in different parts of the kingdom, it is found to be attended with advantage to the cause of religion.

Of those persons who object to any interference with church patronage or the ties by which the church and state are connected, it may be asked, in which of the following features of that connexion does the virtue lie ?

1st. Would the power of the church depart from it, if the congregations had the selecting of their own clergymen, instead of their being simoniacally appointed as at present, from family influence, or from money ?

2nd. Would the income of clergymen, instead of depending on tithes and fees, by being fixed, be the cause of schism in the church, and of periodical contests between the clergy and their flocks ?

3rd. Is the spiritual power of the church of Christ increased by clergymen acting as magistrates for the infliction of temporal punishments ?

4th. Does its efficiency consist in the ministers being pluralists, non-residents, or in receiving large revenues without doing any duty in return ; whilst miserably-pittanced, over-wrought curates are half starved ?

It would be insulting the common sense of the reader to expect an answer in the affirmative to any of these questions.

As to the first, and in our opinion the most important, the manner of appointing clergymen

to the cure of souls,—considering as we do, the assumption by any laical individual of the power to select a religious teacher for a congregation, to be an act of most monstrous tyranny, by which the guidance of conscience is invaded, and religion is insulted: and having fully weighed the objections to the holy office being made a matter of contest between candidates—the possible spirit of animosity thence engendered—the risk of clergymen pandering to an unhealthy religious appetite in their congregations—their probable subserviency to their flocks—as opposed to the present mode of appointment by purchase or other similar arrangement, without consideration to religious fitness: and as between two evils, it would be childish to choose the greater, because the lesser evil is not good; therefore having tried the present mode of appointing, and being convinced that it is one of unmixed pernicious tendency, we have no hesitation in giving the preference to popular nomination of clergymen.

The object of all the religious members of a congregation must be to procure the services of the best qualified religious instructor; therefore, the consequences apprehended by many persons, of injury to religion from a contest between different portions of a congregation in the appointment of their clergyman, depend we con-

ceive on the want of proper instruction of the people, and which a thorough acquaintance with the subject would obviate. That it may be difficult, perhaps impracticable, to bring persons to the same way of thinking, does not affect the question, unless such difference will prejudice the cause of religion, which we do not admit to be a necessary consequence; for there is much more injury sustained by religion from an apathetic state of the mind, than from any state of excitement which can be produced by such a contest. Besides, as the probability of the occurrence of contests, and of any acrimonious feelings resulting therefrom, will be diminished in the ratio of the increase of information and knowledge; it is therefore the especial duty of the legislature to accompany the power to be entrusted to the people of nominating their clergymen, with more extended means of education.

But if such an approximation in opinion be thought either visionary or too remote, still the intrusting the appointment to the congregation bears another favourable aspect; for as in the event of a contest, it is fair to assume that the best qualified clergyman would be preferred by a majority; therefore there would be not only the moral power of the majority, but also the influence of the clergyman's ability to counteract any

pernicious consequences. And even if a schism in the congregation took place by the minority withdrawing with their favourite candidate, such a termination is to be preferred infinitely to the present state of lukewarmness so frequently displayed.

Also the obstacles on pecuniary grounds, to taking the patronage of the church from the present irresponsible patrons, are imagined to be greater than they are. Thus, when the crown or public bodies have the presentation, there would not be a shadow of injustice, if by the change the public advantage would be forwarded; indeed in that case there is positive injury if not injustice, in continuing the present objectionable mode of appointment. In the event of individuals being proprietors of advowsons, whatever may be the opinion of the expediency or in expediency, abstractedly, of originally recognising this property to the prejudice of public morality; yet, after being sanctioned by the law for ages, it would be too hazardous to retrace our steps, by declaring such property to be forfeited; therefore the deprivation of this private right to church patronage, must be accompanied with compensation, as in the case of any other kind of property required for the public good.

Against this principle of *congregational* nomination, will be directed the accustomed quantity

of misrepresentation and abuse ; but the substantial objection is, that the patronage of a considerable portion of the property in the kingdom, is of too much value to government, to be given up to the people without using every effort to retain it.

Therefore it will be maintained by many, that church patronage does not constitute " an abuse to impair the efficiency of the Establishment." *

But if the congregations, for whose use the Established Church should be kept, take a different view of the matter, they must make their opinions known to the legislature. When the outcry is loud as at present against the system of patronage, a few popular clerical appointments will be made, for the purpose of preventing the people from demanding the recognition of the privilege to nominate their own clergymen ; and as soon as the popular excitement on the subject is allayed by these and other temporary concessions, the former practices will again be resorted to.

Consequent on the power proposed to be given to the congregations in the selecting their clergymen, a corresponding power in their deprivation would be necessary ; for although an arbitrary power of dismissal might be injudicious, from the danger of making the teacher subser-

* See the late church commission.

vient to those to be taught ; yet it is conceived that a modified control would be salutary, inasmuch as the utter hopelessness of getting rid of a clergyman under the present system, however incompetent he may be, is found to be very pernicious to the cause of religion.

The only means of depriving an obnoxious clergyman is either by *degradation* ; by the bishop divesting him of his holy orders, in consequence of his having committed some heinous offence meriting death ; or by *deprivation* by the spiritual court, for some crime or defect proved against him ; or in the case of bishops by a particular clause in an act of parliament. Although the causes of deprivation for misconduct are sufficiently numerous and specific, yet the remedy being to be obtained by an ecclesiastical suit in a spiritual court, is considered as beyond the reach of the laity ; otherwise what could prevent the deprivation of many clergymen, when among other causes of deprivation, are found drunkenness, fornication, adultery, of scandalous life and conversation, &c. &c. ?

With a view to point out the defects in the Established Church, and to propose remedies, the commission lately appointed “for considering the state of the several dioceses in England and Wales,” with the declared object of removing every abuse “that can impair the

efficiency of the Establishment," is sufficiently comprehensive; but if its real design is to be collected from the sentiments of a clerical writer, instead of being appointed to advance ecclesiastical reform, it is to do away with part of the reform already achieved. In one of a series of letters, lately published,* addressed to Sir Robert Peel, the author in alluding to his having sanctioned Catholic Emancipation, and to his present situation of a church commissioner, writes, "It is not to be esteemed a small privilege, sir, that opportunity should be thus given to you, to repair the breach which many are wont to ascribe to what is deemed the greatest error of your political life." In a subsequent letter, the author referring to lay brethren interfering with church matters, writes, "that in the effects of the Act for Catholic Emancipation, there is no exception to the course of Divine Providence visiting with divine vengeance persons so interfering with church matters." Is such language seemly and constitutional, and what dependence can the people put in the intentions of the church commissioners, when a clergyman dares to address such sentiments to one of the commissioners, and at that time the first minister of the crown?

The ecclesiastical commissioners have made

* Published by Baldwin and Cradock, in 1835.

their first report, and it may be received as a sample of those that are to come; except that being the first it may be considered as containing the most prominent examples of the liberality, and reformation of abuses, to be recommended by the commissioners.

It is proposed by the report that two additional bishop's dioceses be created, and that a sufficient number of advowsons be annexed thereto, as will enable the bishops "*to reward deserving clergymen.*" It is sincerely to be desired, that whilst church patronage continues, both the old and the new Bishops will adopt the principle of giving advowsons "*to deserving clergymen*" only; but we do not see any reason for concluding that a different mode of appointing to livings, from the present, will be adopted by the present patrons; and which too frequently includes the patron's relations and dependants, to be advantageous to the spiritual character of their flocks.

The other improvement mentioned in the Report, is that the Dean and Chapter of Westminster on a prebendal stall falling vacant, have consented to an arrangement by which the same is attached to the parish church of St. Margaret. At present the Dean and Chapter are bound to get the parochial duties performed in St. Margaret's, and in general the cure is served by one

of themselves; therefore by attaching the vacant stall to the parish, the Dean and Chapter, instead of getting served the cure of St. Margaret, give up for the public good, the patronage to the King. In other words, in future instead of the Dean and Chapter appointing the clergyman, the appointment will be made by the King, or rather by his ministers. With the desire to view the commissioners' report favourably, yet we cannot estimate very highly the suggestions therein as the means of removing abuses "that impair the efficiency of the establishment."

From the ecclesiastical commissioners we cannot expect much, for these reasons:—

1st, That the commission is presided over by the head of the church, and is principally composed of ecclesiastics, who, although they may not have a direct interest in preserving the imperfections of the church, are yet from the frailty of human nature so much subject to the influence of early associations, as to afford little reason to hope for sufficiently searching remedies at their hands.

2nd, That the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel, lately the Chancellor of the Exchequer one of the commissioners, in his place in the House of Commons, on the 4th of March, on the subject of the parishioners of St. Margaret being allowed to elect their own clergyman, is reported to have said, "that the parishioners

would not be troubled to proceed to the election."

We do not intend to say that the desire of the parishioners of St. Margaret could be complied with, until a similar principle be recognised in the appointing of other clergymen; but feeling as we do, that parishioners are the best judges of the clergyman from whose preaching they would receive the most benefit; we consider, although by the declaration some pleasure might be given to the patrons of church livings, yet that the same was uncalled for.

In short, until the following principles be recognised in ecclesiastical matters, no substantial reform can be expected; that is to say, "That the church is an institution, founded, endowed, and kept up for the advantage of the congregations; and that the pecuniary interest of the clergymen is secondary to the good of their flocks, and must not be allowed to prevent any measures necessary to advance that good."

In the meantime, we are told that the following are to be adopted as the principles upon which abuses are to be remedied—*Residency of clergymen to be enforced—pluralities to cease—tythes to be commuted—bishops' dioceses to be equalized—and an ecclesiastical court for church discipline to be founded.*

RESIDENCY OF CLERGYMEN.

In consequence of the feeling lately excited in the public mind from the anomaly of non-residency, this measure has become absolutely necessary ; but we conceive that it is proposed by government as much from the moral impossibility, consistently with a regard for the immediate existence of the established Church, of continuing any longer the present mode of performing the duty of parishes by curates, as from any sanguine anticipation, entertained, of benefit to religion by its means. However that may be, non-residency is now admitted on all hands to be an abuse, with an universality almost startling, when contrasted with the ideas on that subject lately entertained by the friends of the Established Church. Whether from feelings of shame at having submitted to the abuse for ages—or of joy at the prospect of its being remedied, a false importance is attached by the people to the proposed measure of residency ; as it appears to be expected that the residents in consequence of the proposed law will work a cure for all the evils of the establishment.

Indeed, the effect of residency seems to be generally misunderstood, and its advantages to be much overrated ; as if residency could convert the worldly and trifling pastor into a decent and

religious one, clothed with the spirit of true religion, and endowed with the power of healing the wounded spirit.

Let us suppose that a clergyman is inefficient, or indifferent in the discharge of his pastoral duties; or that he is a fox-hunter, a political parson, or possessed of other similar qualifications; or that in his moral conduct he has no more of the clergyman than is required to keep him out of the cognizance of the proposed ecclesiastical court; or that he is a highly paid rector without any temporal inducement to exertion, and who leaves his cure to be filled by a curate whose means of living depend on the good opinion of the parishioners. In these cases, we profess to be at a loss to conceive in what respect the residency of such a clergyman shall do good. Is it expected that thereupon his abilities, his conduct, and his manners, will undergo the change requisite to make him a useful minister of religion, respected by his parishioners? or that the cause of religion will be advanced by substituting a careless rector in the place of a zealous curate? If not, residency will not operate as a remedy in these cases; and as to those ministers who are true disciples of Christ, with a cure of souls, sure we are that the new law of residency will not affect them; they are already at their posts.

Without going deeper, and striking at the root of the evil, by subjecting clergymen on their appointment to an additional ordeal of their fitness beyond the present which is found to be altogether insufficient, it is vain to expect any material improvement in the moral usefulness of clergymen; and without such improvement, it is expecting rather too much, that their residency should make the parishioners blind to their imperfections.

At the same time, to permit clergymen to enjoy the profits of their livings, without in return giving that spiritual instruction to the people, for which these advantages were intended as a compensation, is a monstrous anomaly, and one of the greatest abuses of the Established Church; the abuse will be nothing lessened, although in the absence of the rich pluralist, the spiritual duties of the cure may be most ably performed by a curate, with scarcely the salary of a groom. If the enjoyment of large temporal advantages is useful in forwarding the cause of religion, the well endowed possessor ought to be resident that his parishioners may reap the benefit; if these advantages are so great as to enervate the possessor, then let them be curtailed, until that danger entirely disappears; and let the deduction be otherwise appropriated for the instruction of the people.

Therefore, although reasons may exist which shall give the advantage in usefulness to the resident rector, or to the working curate, yet those reasons are altogether extraneous to the clerical rank of the officiating clergy; and if it is a matter of indifference, as far as religion is concerned, whether the duty of a parish be performed by a rector or his curate, then residency as a remedy for any of the evils alleged against the church, will be consequently ineffectual.

PLURALITIES TO CEASE.

If by the ceasing of pluralities, those persons are prevented from becoming clergymen, who require that inducement to their becoming clergymen, the change will be a positive good.

Also, if by means of a plurality a clergyman having no inducement to exert himself as a spiritual guide left the *drudgery* of his living to be performed by a curate; if by the ceasing of pluralities, that individual found that he was not surrounded by the enjoyments to which he had become accustomed, it might happen that the change would operate a moral improvement in his mind, and make him a more efficient clergyman and a better member of society.

Yet upon the whole, although pluralities are most monstrous, and ought never to have existed, the probable advantage to religion from their ceasing appears to be much over-rated.

But if the commissioners report against the expediency of pluralities, shall we have to wait for the improvement until after the death of the present incumbents? It occurs to us, that the best course of proceeding for taking care of the incumbent's vested rights, and not losing sight of the spiritual wants of the congregations, will be to appoint curates, with a respectable allowance out of the livings, to assist the present incumbents during their lives, and who shall succeed to the livings on their death.

COMMUTATION OF TITHES AND THE EQUALIZATION OF THE LIVINGS OF BISHOPS.

These measures will be useful to lessen the odium entertained against the church; but if the commutation be only voluntary on the part of the clergymen, as proposed some months since by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the advantage will be imaginary. A compulsory commutation by putting an end to a fruitful source of dispute between the clergyman and his parishioners, will have a beneficial tendency; but we confess

ourselves sceptical as to the improvement to be effected thereby in the religious capability of the clergyman, which after all, is the desideratum to be accomplished, and without which all reform in church affairs will be temporary only in its effects.

ECCLESIASTICAL COURT FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

This may be made a real remedy, if set about with determination. Every thing will depend on the constitution of the court. To make it efficacious, it must be of easy access, and prompt in its decisions. If a proper code be formed, so that the ministers may know their duty, and their flocks be certain of their well-founded complaints being redressed, we firmly believe that great benefit to religion may be accomplished by means of this proposed court.

In any measures of church reform to be adopted with the view to strengthening the establishment, the religious wants of the poorer classes in the community should have the first consideration. We do not know of any more effectual means of hastening the downfall of the

Established Church, than a continuance in the present exclusive system pursued in many parish churches, in which the service by a studied adaptation to the religious wants and feelings of the wealthy classes, has the effect of detaching from the Established Church the sympathies of the poorer classes in the community.

Before concluding, we may be allowed to say a few words to our brethren of the Established Church, as to the relative position of Churchmen and dissenters in this country, and the light in which the latter are too frequently regarded by the former.

It is a matter of dispute whether Churchmen or Dissenters are the more numerous body in this country. At all events, the latter are so many and respectable, that no government can with impunity neglect their reasonable desires; and if they go on increasing as they have of late years, they will assuredly at no great length of time outnumber the churchmen: when that time does arrive, the problem will probably be solved, whether it be just and reasonable, that the Dissenters shall then continue to submit to various exactions for the support of the Establishment, imposed on them when they were a contemned and insignificant part of the community; and whether the revenues of the church shall be confined to the Establishment, when the

latter is less powerful than the dissenting church. If so, it may be asked, where is the line to be drawn? Shall the monopoly be continued until the latter constitute two-thirds—three-fourths of the community—or until the Establishment be reduced to a few individuals, interested in upholding it?

To those persons, if there are such, who conscientiously think that the majority in numbers of a nation should in their religious government be directed by the minority, who from fortuitous causes have adopted dogmas somewhat different from those of the majority, both sects being Christians and equally satisfied with the saying characteristics of their respective creeds: To the more bigoted of those persons, the absurdity of the revenues of the Established Church being restricted to the use of a religious establishment after its usefulness has so far departed, by the falling off of the people from that to another church, “is a sealed book;” with them the danger would be vital, and their opposition to any modification to suit the altered circumstances would be, nay is, uncompromising in proportion to the magnitude of their prejudice, or of their interest in favour of the existing state of things; such persons will die in the last ditch surrounding the Establishment, and will enjoy the harmless satisfaction of thinking themselves martyrs!

Thank God! the number of the unwise friends of the Established Church are few, in proportion to the number of reflecting friends, who although equally desirous of supporting the Establishment, have yet a consideration for the sentiments of the conscientious Dissenters from that Establishment. Those reflecting friends do not shut their eyes and ears to daily occurrences; they see, they hear of numbers falling off from the Establishment, on some real or imaginary ground of complaint. Instead of the worse than futile, the unwise attempt to prevent such falling off by restraints, and bolstering up the Establishment by temporal means, those reflecting friends would throw more widely open the doors of that church for the egress of all who were inclined to go; they would repudiate every species of restraint; they would disclaim every kind of support, unless of a spiritual nature; they would invite competition in zeal with conscientious Dissenters in the cause of the Catholic Christian Church; and their ministry would be crowned with success, not only in this world by the increased numbers of their congregations, but in the world which is to come, by a reward beyond all price, where "there shall be one fold and one Shepherd."

As has always been the case, the outcry of those persons interested in upholding an abuse

is in proportion to its magnitude; hence, when it is intended to reform notorious abuses in the church, its patrons raise the cry of “vested rights;” speeding on the shout, the aristocratic priests—the pluralists—the drones—those who batten on the impurities of the system, endeavour vociferously to drown the weak moaning plaint of the real labourers in the vineyard, the holy men who devote their days to the cause of God upon wages doled out with a niggard hand by an arrogant non-resident priest; all the time lauding the beauties of the system, and exclaiming against all change, as being attended with the dangers of revolution!

But it is now pretty generally admitted that a very considerable change must take place in the government of church affairs in England. The public opinion on the subject of the necessity of such change is much more universal than it was on the necessity of reform in the state; and the subject itself is one that makes a deeper impression on the mind. Indeed the reformation or renovation of the Established Church is an inevitable consequence of the reform of the municipal government of the state, to preserve that congruity between them which must exist as long as they continue in connexion.

In tracing the progress of the secular powers of the church, it appears that with their increase,

its spiritual power decreased ; consequently that to augment the spiritual power of the church, its temporal power must be lessened ; to have the ministers efficient instructors in religion, their minds must not be distracted in striving with their flocks for the improvement of their stipend. The vestry and churchwardens are the proper persons to be entrusted with the management of that point ; and all intelligent and sincere friends of the church must be desirous of seeing clergymen desist from intermeddling with the secular management of the church ; and to direct their efforts to their legitimate object, the amelioration of the religious and moral condition of the people.

The acts of the legislature regarding the church of late years, have evidently had in view the advancement of its temporal more than of its spiritual power. But it is vain in the church to attempt by such means to lead public opinion in the present age, and to regain the dominion which the Roman Catholic Church formerly possessed. The attempt is unwise. The people are friendly to religious instruction, and inclined to promote the interest of the clergymen in return for their spiritual guidance. This is the natural state of feeling between them in an enlightened age ; and consequently if it does not exist, there must be a baneful influence at work to prevent it.

Instead of wishing to diminish the moral influence of the church, we would much rather see that influence increased; not by means of augmented livings, and of additional secular power given to the clergymen; but by the respect and love of their flocks, acquired in return for the zealous discharge by the pastors of the duties of their sacred calling. With a view to an increase of such influence, let the connexion between the church and the aristocracy be dissolved; take from the clergyman all inducement to pander to the vitiated taste of any class for gain, and substitute a nobler object of ambition; let those persons only be appointed to the holy office, who embrace that calling, not in obedience to family arrangements, as a mere means of temporal advantage; but from a conviction of the importance of the sacred trust to be reposed in them; men who will promote good will and love towards all other denominations of Christians—who will not foster contentions or ill-will towards other sects; nor advocate from the pulpit the unchristian spirit of persecution—pastors, whose rivalry with other shepherds, shall consist not in the number or riches of their respective flocks, but in their moral and religious acquirements,—then the usefulness and influence of the church will be augmented, in proportion to the object of their labours being ennobled and sanctified.



